Center for Modern Greek Studies

Greek American Oral History Project
Transcription

Tape:

Subject: Artemis Pavellas
Third Party: Ron Pavellas
Interviewer: Peter Haikalis
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Haikalis: This is an interview of Artemis Pavellas, taken on May 12, 2001 for the archives of the oral history program at the center for Modern Greek Studies at San Francisco State University. I'm Peter Haikalis and I will be the interviewer. Thank you very much for consenting to the interview by us too. We talked to your son at length and he's here at the table and he'll chime in whenever he wants to during the course of this interview (whenever you need to be reminded of something). So, why don't we start by telling me about your early life in Portland Oregon? That was where you were born?

Pavellas: No, it was San Francisco.

Haikalis: You were born in San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Haikalis: Ok, well so that…

Pavellas: The earliest I can recollect is when–when my mother passed on. She was in her thirties and we were with our father and he had a classic candy store.

Haikalis: Ok now you were of five children? Correct?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And, your mother's maiden name was?

Pavellas: Helen.

Haikalis: Helen, and her maiden name?

Pavellas: Oh…uh…

Ron: Diakakis ? (**check spelling**)*{012}*

Haikalis: Diakakis.

Pavellas: Well yeah, Diakakis.

Haikalis: And your father was George?

Pavellas: George Pagonas. (**check spelling**)*{012}*

Haikalis: Pagonas.

Pavellas: Yeah.

Haikalis: And you had the following brothers and sisters *{013}?* in order of birth Harry, Beatrice, Angeline?

Pavellas: Angel Anne.

Haikalis: You…Artemis…number four…and the fifth one was Florence?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And your mother died in childbirth with Florence correct?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And as a result your father, as you had told me before, your dad felt that he couldn't look after the newborn?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: So Florence was put for adoption?.

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And she was adopted by a doctor?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And you are not aware of anything that's ever happened to her since that time?

Pavellas: No.

Haikalis: So she's not really part–not part of your life?

Pavellas: No.

Haikalis: Except that you knew that she was born?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And that was about it?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: So you're going back to your dad, he owned a candy store?

Pavellas: Yes, he was owner of a candy store.

Ron?: *{019} ?*

Haikalis: In San Francisco?

Pavellas: uh….

Haikalis: Or Stockton?

Pavellas: Stockton…it's Stockton.

R & P (simultaneously): Stockton.

Haikalis: Stockton…oh what was the name of the candy store?

Pavellas: I don't know.

Haikalis: Oh you don't know?

Pavellas: It was a classic candy store–that's it.

Ron: And he came here at age 14 as I heard the story…as a…an apprentice to a confectioner and he became a master confectioner himself.

Haikalis: I see.

Ron: And that's then when he opened up the candy store.

Pavellas: Yeah.

Haikalis: But he had the candy store in Stockton, but you were all born here in San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: Is that because–had he moved here or was it that you just came–you're mother just came here to have the children?

Pavellas: <*sigh*> I, I know that the–that the store was burned down.

Haikalis: In Stockton?

Pavellas: In Stockton

Haikalis: I see.

Pavellas: And that's probably when we made the move.

Haikalis: To move to San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Haikalis: And what did he do in San Francisco?

Pavellas: Well he just had…just took any job he had in, in a restaurant.

Haikalis: He just had restaurant jobs?

Pavellas: Just dishwashing and stuff like that and then he gradually got into being a cook and gradually got into owning a partnership.

Haikalis: In a restaurant?

Pavellas: Yeah, in a restaurant.

Haikalis: Oh, he never went back to the candy business again?

Pavellas: No.

Haikalis: Okay. So was he partners with another Greek man in San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes, I can't, can't say. I'm very bad because I can't remember the last name of the man…

Haikalis: Oh that's all right…that's the earliest part of your life.

Pavellas: Yeah.

Haikalis: Anyway, did you go to school here in San Francisco?

Pavellas: In San Francisco, yes.

Haikalis: And when…

Pavellas: And also in Portland, Oregon. A good deal of it in Portland, Oregon.

Haikalis: So how did you find your way to Portland?

Pavellas: Well…my, my father was told there were positions there.

Haikalis: I see.

Pavellas: Openings–jobs were very hard again…very hard to get.

Haikalis: This is right at the beginning of the depression?

Pavellas: Yes.

Ron: But mom, didn't you skip over your time in the orphanage in–in Stockton?

Pavellas: Yeah, I guess I would but you know I can't remember, I know I was about three years old–when we put–were put in the children's home.

Haikalis: All of you? Brothers and sisters?

Pavellas: Yes.

Ron: No, not Harry.

Pavellas: Not Harry.

Ron: Harry stayed with grandpa.

Pavellas: They let him–they let him stay.

Haikalis: This when your father's store burnt down?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: So he didn't know where to turn for help?

Ron: Yeah, so the three girls went to the orphanage. It was an orphanage in Stockton.

Pavellas: The thing is that my–my father had a relative that was–was in the insurance business and he didn't pay the insurance.

Ron: He kept the premium but didn't pay.

Pavellas: So my father was absolutely broke.

Haikalis: Oh, so your dad had paid the insurance and the man who owned the insurance company didn't pay the premiums?

Pavellas: Right…that's right.

Haikalis: So when the fire occurred–he was–he lost everything?

Pavellas: Everything…everything.

Haikalis: So he had no resources to even look after his own family?

Pavellas: No, no, no, no.

Haikalis: Well that sucks. He–that's a terrible thing. Was he a Greek man too?

Pavellas: OH… yes.

Haikalis: This relative in Stockton?

Pavellas: Oh yeah he was a Greek man.

Haikalis: Oh my.

Pavellas: I think he's related in some way too. <*laughing*>

Haikalis: That's even worse. Well, anyway, so how long did you stay in that orphanage?

Pavellas: I think about two years.

Haikalis: Two years? And by that time your father came to San Francisco?

Pavellas: They–he sent for us and we were on the train.

Haikalis: From Stockton to San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Haikalis: And then did Harry look after you…help to look after you all?

Pavellas: Harry was on his own. He was a little newspaper boy.

Haikalis: At nine years old?

Pavellas: On his own.

Haikalis: And you girls all sort of had to look after each other then?

Pavellas: We did.

Ron: Bea was the mom.

Pavellas: Beatrice was the mom.

Ron: A 7-year-old mom.

Pavellas: Yeah. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Oh my goodness! So that was a difficult life for you…as kids.

Pavellas: It was difficult for Bea because you know she was the oldest and was responsible.

Haikalis: And your dad never got married again?

Pavellas: No, never.

Haikalis: And he never married…so the kids had to sort of look after themselves and also run the house and look after the father?

Pavellas: Yeah…yeah…yeah.

Haikalis: That was pretty hard for everybody?

Pavellas: We didn't look after the father. Father was never around. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: He was busy working, trying to make money for you?

Pavellas: No, not only that. He liked to gamble.

Haikalis: Ohhhh.

Pavellas: Oh, I don't like to talk against my father, but he liked to gamble.

Ron: That's not talking against him. That's just what he did.

Haikalis: He–that was his weakness?

Pavellas: Yeah, yeah–coffee houses.

Haikalis: And Greek coffeehouses?

Pavellas: Yeah Greek coffeehouses.

Haikalis: Oh, so–so that part of the money that he made, he just gambled away then?

Pavellas: We never knew. We never knew whether he made money or lost money. <*laughs*>

Haikalis: Oh my. So you really had a hard life?

Pavellas: We did. Very much…we kept the roof over our head, but we–we were sometimes terribly hungry.

Haikalis: Where did you live? What part of San Francisco?

Pavellas: Oh, we moved around a lot.

Haikalis: 'Cause he didn't always pay the rent probably.

Pavellas: Oh yes. He always paid the rent.

Haikalis: He paid the rent. So he always made sure you had a place to stay?

Pavellas: Oh yes.

Haikalis: He was responsible about that?

Pavellas: Oh, absolutely.

Haikalis: But that sometimes he wasn't much more responsible for the rest?

Pavellas: Yeah, he just wasn't around.

Haikalis: Did you have many Greek friends when you were growing up?

Pavellas: No, but he did want us to go to the Greek Church and–and take Greek…

Haikalis: Language?

Pavellas: Language, the Greek language.

Haikalis: Did you go?

Pavellas: And…yes, but the trouble was we didn't know any Greek and the Greek priest didn't know any English.

Pavellas: So it was an impossibility. We wrote beautifully, we wrote beautiful Greek. <*laughs*> And anything that we could copy, but the only one that

took to it was Bea, and Bea is very good at languages…all languages. She was a natural for it.

Haikalis: Now is she still living?

Pavellas: Oh yes, she's living.

Haikalis: Now where does she live?

Pavellas: She's in Newport Beach, in a rest home–a rest home, and she's always teaching, always teaching people that need the English language. Spanish people, Greek people…I don't know.

Haikalis: *{068} ?* people?

Pavellas: Oh all kinds.

Haikalis: She was always a natural linguist.

Pavellas: Oh yes, she was.

Haikalis: So she was the one that the Greek language lessons took?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And the rest of you had some difficulty?

Pavellas: Oh yes.

Haikalis: So you kind of drifted away…from…

Pavellas: We told papa it was an impossibility you know, because we couldn't–he couldn't understand English and we couldn't understand–we needed a translator and we didn't have it.

Haikalis: Did you go to church at all?

Pavellas: <*cough*> We did at times, when my father took us.

Haikalis: But you weren't regular goers?

Parellas: No that was because we didn't understand the language.

Haikalis: And everything was in Greek at the time.

Pavellas: Yes, uh huh.

Haikalis: So anyway, then you moved on to Portland.

Pavellas: That's right.

Haikalis: How old were you when you went out there?

Pavellas: Let's see, when I was in school. I guess I was about five years old or something like that.

Haikalis: And *{075} ?* you lived there then until you married–met your husband?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And so tell us about how that occurred.

Pavellas: Well he was collecting….

Haikalis: Okay, please let me interrupt for a second. Conrad Pavellas is Artemis'…was Artemis' husband and we're skipping up to about 1934, 1933 then, right? And had he already taken the newspaper? Had his father and mother died already?

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Ron: It would be 1935 probably.

Haikalis: 35'.

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: So he–so then it was 1935 and he came to Portland to collect subscriptions for the Prometheus newspaper?

Pavellas: Yes…and…

Haikalis: Okay now… I'll let you go on from there…

Pavellas: And then I found out from all he told me the collecting business–they were just paying it out of charity. They didn't want it.

Haikalis: They didn't want the paper anymore?

Pavellas: No, they didn't want it anymore. And…and that put a damper on the whole thing you know.

Haikalis: So how did you meet him?

Pavellas: Uh well now how did I meet *{088}* ?…Oh my father met him. He went to my father I think for the subscription.

Haikalis: For the subscription.

Pavellas: And my father was delighted and asked him if he liked to come and meet the family what with three girls. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: He's looking for a prospect.

Pavellas: Right. <*laugh*> But he had Bea in mind, he didn't have me. I was the youngest. They didn't believe in that you know...the oldest first…

Haikalis: The oldest marries first. <*laugh*>

Pavellas: Well when I saw Connie I wanted him, I wanted him! <*laughs*> And when I wanted something I went after it. <*laughs*>

Haikalis: You sound like Diane. <*laugh*>

Pavellas: Uh, yeah. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Was he a good lookin' man?

Pavellas: Oh, he was beautiful.

Haikalis: And tall?

Pavellas: No, not tall. But a very handsome…beautiful man.

Haikalis: What color hair did he have?

Pavellas: I have pictures of him there.

Haikalis: Okay, we'll take a look at one of those.

Pavellas: And his hair was black wavy hair.

Ron: He looked like Cornell Wilde?

Pavellas: Oh he looked like that.

Haikalis: Oh, well…I can see why you were interested then.

Pavellas: Or James Mason or James Mason.

Haikalis: James Mason or Cornell Wilde. So you married him.

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: Right away?

Pavellas: Oh right away.

Haikalis: You didn't have a long courtship?

Pavellas: No.

Ron: What two weeks mom?

Pavellas: Gee, I don't think it was that long! <*laugh*>

Haikalis: What did you dad think about it?

Pavellas: Well, he was–we were on the trans–streetcar and we girls were separated. My father was in the front and we were in the back and then I mean my uh, my father and my husband were in the front and he was telling him he wanted to marry me and he looked back there. And he didn't look happy you know cause he was thinking of Bea you know. He wasn't thinking of me you know, but he gave–he gave–he gave us consent.

Haikalis: He did.

Pavellas: Yeah, he gave us consent. I wasn't 18 then you know. I had to have a consent.

Haikalis: And were you happy that he agreed?

Pavellas: Oh, I should say. But I did so much balling when we left. He went, "Well aren't you happy??? Or are you sad??" <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Now was your husband impetuous like that…all the time?

Pavellas: No.

Haikalis: No? Just in this courtship?

Pavellas: Yeah. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Usually he didn't make up his mind like that. That was spur of the

moment. <*laugh*>

Pavellas: <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Got married in Portland?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: Did you get married in a civil ceremony or in a church?

Pavellas: A civil ceremony.

Haikalis: City hall?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: And then you continued. You went on your honeymoon?

Pavellas: That's right, in a little T? What do they call those Fords?

Ron: Model T.

Pavellas: Model T Fords. <*laugh*> All across the country in a model T Ford. And no *{109} ?* <*laugh*>

Haikalis: And you went around collecting the newspaper subscriptions?

Pavellas: Yes.

Ron: All the way up to Canada.

Pavellas: All the way to Canada. And we didn't have any money and we were there. We were on our last legs. We had to depend on the–the subscriptions in Canada. And so, they knew we were newlyweds. Once *{113} ?* had to show their money and this and that…

Ron: Like a border crossing.

Pavellas: Yeah the border crossing…but when Connie–Connie was a great talker. He could persuade anybody. But he persuaded them to let out because he told a story that it was getting subscriptions and he was going to have money and…

Haikalis: How did your sister Bea feel about that?

Pavellas: She had a boyfriend. She wasn't the least bit interested.

Haikalis: Oh she wasn't–so that made it easy. <*laugh*>

Pavellas: <*laugh*>

Haikalis: So then you came back...

Pavellas: Well Angie had her eye on him.

Haikalis: Oh but you beat her to him.

Pavellas: Yeah, Angie had her eye on him. She was really hurt that I beat her to him. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Now then you came back to San Francisco?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: With him…and then that's when the newspaper folded up shortly thereafter?

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Haikalis: And did he talk very much about the newspaper to you?

Pavellas: Well, it–it was–it was really hardship, real hardship.

Haikalis: For him to talk about it?

Pavellas: Yeah it was. Painful for him and it was his father's business and he felt he owed it to his father you know.

Haikalis: And he had disappointed his father by not being able to continue at all?

Pavellas: No, no. He could understand what misery his father went through, because his father felt like it was charity. They made him feel like it was charity.

Haikalis: Oh you mean towards the end of his life.

Pavellas: Yeah, yes.

Haikalis: That they were just supporting it from…

Pavellas: Yes, yes.

Haikalis: Oh that's terrible.

Pavellas: So…

Haikalis: Greek people can be really mean about some things like that can't they?

Pavellas: Oh yes, well–well, they say: "Well you know I don't want it, but I'll pay for it but I really don't want it you know."

Haikalis: Well that doesn't make people feel very well does it?

Pavellas: No, you don't feel like you have anything there at all.

Haikalis: Did he talk very much about his dad?

Pavellas: Only that he loved him dearly. He loved them both dearly.

Haikalis: And his mother?

Pavellas: Oh he loved his mother…loved his mother.

Haikalis: And he was the only child?

Pavellas: Yes, I think there was another but they died.

Haikalis: Another one that died?

Pavellas: Yeah, yeah.

Haikalis: So then after that, you–your life pretty much follows the pattern that your son described right?

Pavellas: Well yes…not as interesting. Ronny has an interesting life.

Ron: Well when you mentioned Rossi park you were living where now?

Pavellas: Oh Arguello.

Ron: Was it Arguello or was it near…uh…

Pavellas: I thh–the tennis court. It was a tennis court

Ron: Now Rossi park is around the Mission district isn't it?

Haikalis: What's it called?

Ron: Rossi Park.

Pavellas: No it wasn't!

Haikalis: D-r-o-c-e?

Ron: R-o-s-s-i.

Pavellas: I think it was at Rossi Park. It was a tennis court we used to go to play in.

Ron: But isn't that near where Angie lived with grandpa?

Pavellas: Angie, oh no. That's on uh… on uh Guerrero.

Ron: Guerrero…yeah, isn't that near where Rossi park is?

Pavellas: No.

Haikalis: Rossi park is a little playground. It's not a big park.

Ron: Oh …oh see…well I'm out of it.

Haikalis: It's just a little–I know what you mean, it's a tennis court and all. Now your father then continued to live on.

Pavellas: Yes, he, he…

Haikalis: How old was he when he passed away?

Pavellas: Well he was in his 60's.

Haikalis: Was he a gambler all the way to the end of his life?

Pavellas: Yeaup. He–I never saw him when he was healthy. It seems like I can't remember when he was healthy.

Ron: Tuberculosis.

Pavellas: Yeah he had Tuberculosis. They put him in the sanitarium. I guess he had money enough to cover it…and...

Ron: I remember us taking trips to the sanitarium, bringing him fresh fruit down here and we traveled all the way down Mission Street and highway 101to what's the name of the town right up here?

Pavellas: Oh…

Ron: Belmont!

Pavellas: Yeah Belmont…

Haikalis: That's where the "TB san" was?

Pavellas: Yeah.

Ron: Yeah.

Pavellas: Yeah, it was a wonderful cemetery.

Haikalis: Was that like a county cemetery?

Pavellas: Oh…I don't know. I don't think so…

Haikalis: It's private?

Pavellas: It was private.

Haikalis: So he lived–did he die from TB?

Pavellas: No, no he came out a healthy man. No smoking or anything. No smoking…nothing.

Haikalis: So he recovered?

Pavellas: He recovered beautifully, but after that he went back to the coffee houses again and smoked and that was his end…

Haikalis: Did he get the TB again?

Pavellas: Well I think he had emphezema at the very end.

Haikalis: Well he had kind of a miserable life.

Pavellas: Oh yeah.

Haikalis: And your poor mother had passed away many years before?

Pavellas: Yes.

Haikalis: So there was a lot of difficulty there?

Pavellas: Oh yes…

Haikalis: That's interesting to me, that the way you describe your father's life and you with mother and all…and all of the children and then to take a look also at your father in-law and your mother in-law's life–also difficult. So you had to endure a lot of hardship I would say.

Pavellas: Absolutely, yes.

Ron: And we were poor in Brooklyn too.

Pavellas: Oh yeah.

Haikalis: So what was your key to success?

Pavellas: I'm no success. <*laugh*>

Haikalis: Oh yes you are! You lived to 83. I think that's a successful sign.

Pavellas: Yeah oh yeah, I'm a success! <*said sarcastically*> <*laughs*>

Ron: And how many great grandchildren do you have now, six?

Pavellas: Oh I can't, can't even count em' <*laughs*>

Ron: You have six great grandchildren? I'd say that's successful.

Pavellas: <*laugh*>

Haikalis: You had to have a positive outlook?

Pavellas: A positive?

Haikalis: Uh huh.

Pavellas: Well I guess so. I'm pretty cheerful by nature. I'm not a morbid person.

Ron: I'd say so. When…when mom tells…

Pavellas: But I lived with–I lived with a man that was very morbid.

Ron: But mom knows how to do best–better than anybody is to love.

Haikalis: That's sometimes is what it needs…what you need to have. What do you think about…do you ever think much about your Greek background? Your Greek heritage?

Pavellas: Well I do. I wonder what–how come Ronny is–is so–his looks are so Greek when he didn't really have much of it. And…and how come I have it? I got it from my father. He came home late of night of course. Once in a while, I can only remember once in awhile…and he'd come in with a big salami with cheese, grapes and *{171} ?* and something to eat and he couldn't wake up my sisters but I was always hungry. <*laughs*>

Haikalis: So you used to get up and eat and talk with him?

Pavellas: I eat and talk with him, yes.

Haikalis: Did he recollect his life then when you were together?

Pavellas: He always talked about the beautiful beaches in Greece and I think he dreamed of going back.

Haikalis: And he never went back?

Pavellas: And he never went back and I feel so sad that he couldn't have gone back.

Haikalis: Now how old was he when he came to the United States?

Pavellas: I don't know.

Ron: I think 14 is what I heard.

Pavellas: Really? That's young huh?

Ron: I can't…

Haikalis: You remember your grandfather?

Ron: I do, uh huh…

Haikalis: Because you said you used to play games with him?

Ron: I did. He taught me casino, and Chinese checkers and…

Haikalis: Did he ever talk very much about his early life?

Ron: He wasn't very good in English–which is simple language.

Pavellas: But he learned the American…the English paper.

Haikalis: He read the paper?

Pavellas: He read the paper.

Haikalis: He was probably looking for the horses!

Pavellas: <*laugh*> I don't know, but he kept up with the news.

Ron: I don't think he played horses, he was a card player.

Pavellas: Yeah, he was a card player.

Ron: He used to go to the Greek Café Dia *{181} (sp.?)*

Pavellas: Oh yeah.

Ron: Cause they're down on 3rd Street and San Francisco…that's where they all were.

Pavellas: Oh yeah, all that smoking you know and inhaling all that smoke.

Haikalis: So anyway, how did you…if he didn't? You must have had to speak little Greek then?

Pavellas: Oh I know a few words like uh. uh *{184} ?* and uh...

Haikalis: I mean when you were younger.

Pavellas: I …I think a few a little words. They said I talked Greek when I was little.

Haikalis: Yeah because you had to communicate with him, but then you just– not been…

Pavellas: Not communicated–not being married to another Greek woman.

Haikalis: A second wife…

Pavellas: I wasn't able to...

Haikalis: But you were sort of–you didn't have any touch there so you lost all of that.

Pavellas: No, no, no. It could have happened if I had <hiccup> an American Greek Priest. Now they had them…and so…

Haikalis: You didn't have any sense of connection to those priests…those early priests here in San Francisco either? You didn't like priests?

Pavellas: No, it was too late then.

Haikalis: Okay, is there anything else you want to share with us?

Pavellas: No, I can't remember anything else.

Haikalis: Well I think that's an interesting insight on another life that took place here. Thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW